

3 - MLR's Stop Starry Program is Critical Shielding Strategy to Protect Lakes and Lake Communities

by Jeff Forester, Executive Director of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

In 2015 the invasive algae starry stonewort was confirmed on the first Minnesota lake, Lake Koronis near Paynesville. Initial investments into treatments totaled over



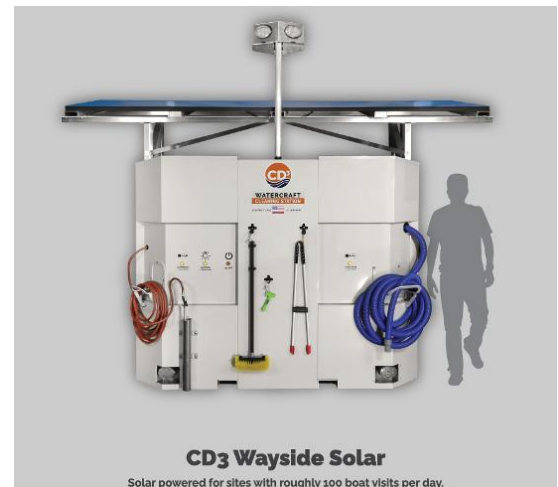
\$800,000, but despite this aggressive and ongoing management, the infestation spread 7% a year. It now covers about 70% of the littoral area of the lake.

Starry stonewort is a fast-spreading invasive algae that can form dense mats on a lake's surface, choke out native species and overwhelm fish spawning beds. It is highly transferable and has now been confirmed in 19

water bodies in Minnesota. Lake Koronis, like many lakes in Minnesota, is a core community resource to Paynesville and Stearns County.

“Anything that impacts a Minnesota lake,” said Kayla Hanke, Program Manager and Civic Organizer for MN Lakes and Rivers, “impacts the entire community. One of the most important aspects of the Stop Starry Program is the work we will be doing to engage the entire community in lake protection.”

In 2021 the Minnesota Legislature awarded Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates a \$1 million dollar grant from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to give these communities a new tool to help fight against aquatic invasive species. The grant will allow MLR to install self-service boat cleaning stations at the public accesses on lakes infested with starry stonewort. The goal is to shield all the other lakes in Minnesota from this aquatic invasive species.



"Starry stonewort can move very quickly within a 50-mile radius of an infested water body," said Jeff Forester, executive director of the nonprofit Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates. "So it's local movement to adjacent lakes that's really the concern."



Multiple studies have found that while over 90% of boaters know the steps they need to take to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, only about half fully cleaned, drained and dried their watercraft every time they were leaving an access. The reason, according to this research, is that boaters do not have the tools they need when and where they need them so that they can fully clean, drain and dry their watercraft.

"The boat cleaning stations being provided by MLR, with funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund," said Jeff Forester, Executive Director of MN Lakes and Rivers Advocates, "provides the tools boaters need; a wet-dry vacuum, high-pressure air hose, scrubbing brushes, grabbing tools and under carriage/overhead lights to help boaters see at night. Our goal is to prevent starry stonewort from ending up in hundreds or thousands of lakes in the state."

A Minnesota company, CD3 General Benefit Corporation, makes the best free standing boat cleaning stations in the country. Last month CD3 delivered stations to remote accesses on the Leech Lake Reservation. Five more stations were delivered to Beltrami County. “We hope to have twenty-eight stations in place and operational by open water, 2022,” said Forester.



Clean water, and the wild river dependent on that clean water, is a primary resource for the Leech Lake Band. The starry stonewort infestation on Leech Lake threatens this critical resource. Said Kate Hagsten, Division of Resource Management (DRM) with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, “By protecting our natural resources we are protecting our community, our cultural heritage and our future.”

More stations are planned for later this year at lakes in Itasca, Beltrami, Meeker, Pope, Stearns and Wright counties. MLR will work with local partners to build support among boaters and the boating community to use the CD3 stations and Clean, Drain Dry their boats every time they leave a waterbody, but particularly when leaving a lake or river infested with starry stonewort. By protecting their lakes, they are protecting their local tax base, their heritage, and their way of life.

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